

Arts & Sciences Magazine

A&S MAGAZINE (HTTPS://MAGAZINE.KRIEGER.JHU.EDU/) » FALL 2018 (HTTPS://MAGAZINE.KRIEGER.JHU.EDU/VOLUME/V16N1/) » PIANIST OF THE AGES

Pianist of the Ages

Fall 2018

By Michael Anft (https://magazine.krieger.jhu.edu/author/manft/)



Jenny Lin [photo by Liz Linder]

“I’m really all over the place. People have a hard time figuring out what kind of pianist I am,” says **Jenny Lin ’94, ’98 (Peab)** from her home in

Manhattan.

A Peabody-trained concert artist, Lin has spent two decades performing around the world, and recording three dozen albums. But it is her far-flung approach to classical music—the entire majestic and temporal sweep of it—that has made its mark.

Lin has recorded albums of works by everyone from evergreen favorites like J.S. Bach to edgy modernists like Ernest Bloch to a host of (often little-known) contemporary composers, gaining fame for her bravado and technique. She might baffle some people, but critics have figured out that her rangy repertoire makes her special. *The Washington Post* calls her “one of the most interesting pianists in America”—a sign that she’s not losing anyone as she races between styles and centuries.

“It’s my own curiosity and perhaps a response to how the composers of our time are seen,” says Lin, explaining her wide embrace of music, including works that many listeners might find challenging. “I always question how we can find ways to develop a line of continuation between the composers everyone reveres to ones who work today.”

This fall, Lin will release recordings of works by luminaries: Chopin’s nocturnes and the piano music of Artur Schnabel. She will perform

Schnabel's pieces, along with some Beethoven favorites, at a special concert at the Library of Congress in November.

But she continues to find inspiration in newer composers, something that makes her popular among them. Since 2014, Lin has traveled with Philip Glass, accompanying the octogenarian minimalist legend on tour annually and performing a handful of his 20 piano etudes, the full set of which she recorded last year.

"It's a privilege working with him," she says. "When a modern composer like Glass puts his music in front of me, I can just ask him in person what he wants, what he's going for. It's great."

Besides being bold in her artistic choices, Lin has taken hold of her career and bookings—something that's rare among virtuoso performers. She credits her years at the Krieger School, where she obtained a bachelor's degree in German Literature before earning an artist's diploma from the Peabody Conservatory, with readying her for that precarious step.

"When I was in Baltimore, I wasn't just in a conservatory, I was part of a university," says Lin, who grew up in Taipei before living and studying in Vienna, Austria, and then Baltimore. "Back then, conservatories didn't always prepare you for real

life. I'm a big promoter of well-rounded education for musicians. Having a career in entertainment isn't just about performing."

During her years at Homewood, she spread her interests across languages, poetry, and film. Her cross-disciplinary approach to education proved invaluable later, she says, as she programmed her concerts and made repertoire choices.

"I had this idea of going into law school, just to get away from music," Lin says with a laugh. "I was ultimately drawn to languages because there was a wide range of subjects you could take within it."

That she sought out a variety of possibilities is hardly a surprise, given how her career has taken shape. Lin says she worries little about whether people are able to compartmentalize her talents. Instead, she embraces what a musical celebrity of another stripe—pop star Elvis Costello—made his motto: "I don't want to be first, I just want to last."

"Longevity is my goal," Lin says. "I look at what Philip [Glass] is doing and I'm amazed. He's passionate about music, about new artists and composers, and he has all this energy. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be like that?"

© 2020 Johns Hopkins University, Zanvyl Krieger School of Arts & Sciences, 3400 N. Charles St,
Baltimore, MD 21218